Outline of the Proposed Thesis Entitled

# Exploration of Caste, Culture and Politics in the Select Dalit Women's Autobiographies: A Study

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**Introduction:**

An autobiography is a written account of the life of him/her written by him/her-self. Human consciousness is lively reflected through the autobiographies. Autobiography has its origin in the West. The examples are the seventeenth-century diaries of Samuel Peppys and Fanny Burney, and Dorthy Wordsworth's remarkable *Journals* (1798-1828). William Taylor used the word autobiography for the first time in 1797 in the English periodical, the *Monthly Review*. Robert Southey used it in its present sense in 1809. An autobiography is based on the writer's memory. In antiquity such works were typically entitled apologia, purporting to be self-justification. John Henry Newman's autobiography entitled *Apologia Provitasua* was published in1864 is a reference to this tradition.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus introduced his autobiography with self praise. It is a justification of his actions as a Jewish rebel commander of Galilee. The pagan retour Libanius framed his life memoir in C. 374. It was his oration, not of a public kind but of a literary one.

The earliest known autobiography in English is the early 15$^{th}$ century, *Book of Margery Kemp*. The other notable English autobiographies in medieval period are *Lord Herbert of Cherbury* (1643) and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666).

In modern days, autobiography has become a unique and widely read form. *A Fortunate life* (1979) by Albert Facey has become an Australian literary classic. Besides, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank and the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* byBenjamin Franklin are stepping stones in the path of revolt autobiographies. In current literature, autobiography by MalalaYousafzai entitled *I*

*Am Malala: The Girl who Stood up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* has enriched the world autobiography.

The people deprived of basic human rights in India are calledDalits. Dalit literature reflects a new social consciousness and an ideological awakening. The progressive Dalit writers like BaburaoBagul, NamdeoDhasal, DayaPawar, OmprakashValmiki, Bama, Baby Kamble, UrmilaPawar, ArvindMalagatti, Mohan Parmar, BalbirMadnakuduChinnaswamy and many others have earned a name for themselves in Dalit literature.

Hitherto oppressed sections of the societies world over began to write about their plight in creative writing in the early 20th century. African Americans, Red Indians, Blacks in African countries, Dalits in India voiced their anguish in literature. The new world order, fall of British Empire, industrialization and widespread education was responsible for changes in social structures of different societies. The next natural step was their women voicing their anguish and plight and raising their voice against it. It formed its reflection in literature too. Woman from oppressed societies expressed themselves quite freely and confidently world over. In India too we find this phenomenon happened.

This research work attempts to reveal in autobiographies by Dalit writers the crucial expression of casteand cultural discriminatory self experiencesand voicing of socio-historical structures of caste system. Efforts of Jotiba Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in creating consciousness among Dalit women are praiseworthy. Appearance of Dalit women in male autobiographies like sacrificing mother, pain enduring and suffering wife motivated Dalit women to write about their own life experiences. Dalit women have acquired remarkable confidence to write about their own life narratives, as they have been in public spheres right from

the early decades of twentieth century. Dalit women's autobiographies underscore caste as an oppressive tradition.

In this research work, three Dalit women's autobiographies will be studied.

The selected Dalit women's autobiographies for the present study areBama's*Karukku*(1992), KausalyaBaisantri's*DohraAbhishap*(1999), andVimal More's *Teen DagdachiChul* (2000).These women writers are born in the dalit communitiesand are well known activists in the dalit and feminist struggle in India. Their autobiographies have thrown light on the material circumstances under the Dalit women asserted their selfhood and emerged as activist in the movements. Their work can help to show how the exclusion of Dalit women's voices in the caste biased Indian society. Dalit literature is a writing of protest. It expresses the voices against the inhuman conditions of existence to which the Hindu caste system has subjected the Dalits for thousands of years.

Dalit women have been victims of violence and discrimination inflicted by the caste system. They have been victims of caste, culture, politics, and gender and became the weakest among the weaker in Indian society.

Bama's*Karukku* is considered to be the first Tamil Dalit autobiography by Dalit Christian woman. It was published at the time when post-colonial India was witnessing a severe caste and communal violence due to the Mandal agitation and demolition of the historic Babri mosque at Ayodhya by the Hindu fundamentalists. Bama throughout her autobiography vociferously condemns all forms of oppression such as caste, religion, and gender.Bama fervently appeals to her fellow-citizens to erase caste and religious differences and help to establish a just and humane society so that the unprivileged people like Dalits can live with dignity and self respect. In *Karukku*, Bama has found the right space to articulate the

travails and suffering of Dalit women.*Karukku*is a reflection of religion, recreation and education. Bama's writing celebrates Dalit women's revolutionary straties to overcome their oppression. All Dalit writing is to be perceived as a political writing, as a strategy of resistance to social oppression. Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohra Abhishap* is the first and so far the only Dalit autobiography in Hindi written by a woman. The title refers to the author's double predicament as both a Dalit and a woman. This double identity determines the ways she perceives and describes social reality and her own experience on the margins of society. Her autobiography resembles a diary that tells about troubles with maintaining self-esteem during her studies and in her rather frustrating married life. Putting aside the usual ideological restraint of "Dalit consciousness", she straightforwardly addresses the social reality and the problems that arise not only between Dalits and non-Dalits, but also among Dalits themselves, and particularly between Dalit men and women.Vimal More's *Teen DagdachiChul*bear testimony to the lives of the Dalit women of the *Gondhali* and *KudmodeJoshi* castes in Maharashtra. VimalMorehas tried toput words what she has experienced, suffered and understood of the lives the women in these communities. Her husband Dadasaheb More, well writer and social activist, changed her life. He encouraged her to get involved in different revolutionary social organizations and gave her considerable confidence. She learnt to live with self-respect.The above noted three women writers recognize their place as Dalit in a dominated caste system and female in a male dominated society.

Women writers recognize and express the socio-historical explanation of caste, culture, politics, and gender. They deal with these subjects by their own point of view and give the new dimensions of protest as human being.

The selected women's autobiographies provide the feminist voices in Dalit literature. These autobiographies projects on various socio-cultural, socio-

economic, and socio-political dimensions of Dalits in caste system in India. It presents the revolutionary expression on caste, culture, politics, and gender which affected by the social and literary movements.

**The Research Problem**

This research work will try to focus on the issues regarding Dalit women, who have to face multiple problems like caste, culture, politics, gender, poverty, deprivation, and social exclusion. The selected autobiographies reflect humiliating expressions. These selected women writer dared to swim against the tide and have played the role of whistle blower not only for the women in Dalit community but for all Indian women. It stems from the fact that Dalit sub-ordination has imbibed in the psyche of the so called upper caste members. The assaults centuries old by the self-styled *savarna* were internalized by subjugated class. All this made the emancipation of Indian Dalit women impossible.

**Research Methodology:**

The research method to be adopted will be one of the descriptive, analytical and explorative type in which feminist perspective will be used; since the mainstream feminist movement has failed to understand the problem of Dalitwomen in particular, Dalit feminist perspective will be used to analyze the different issues regarding women. Phule-Ambedkarite perspective has emerged in India as new research method to study the Dalit literature as well as other works from social science. This approach tries to find and analyze the problems of women from the JotibaPhule and Dr.BabasahebAmbedkar's point of view.

**Hypotheses:**

- The rigidnature of caste, culture and politics exploit the lives of Dalit women.

- The Dalit women writersfocus on theissues of caste and culturaldiscrimination practiced in the Indian society.
- Dalit writers throw light on the wretched lives of Dalits by experiencing the process of self discovery, identification and empowerment.
- Dalit women writersunderstoodthat they are prohibited by caste, culture, andpolitics and were cursed to remain poor and Dalits.
- Dalit women writerexpress the collective experiences of hurt and humiliation, on the other hand they challenge the hegemonic caste structure and gendered oppression as well as their texts are transformed into a vibrant literary space, where new registers of aesthetic and literary are formulated.
- Dalit writers have developed autobiography as narrative of resistance against caste stranglehold.
- Patriarchy works at the every layer of Indian society.
- Dalit women writers straightforwardly address the social reality and the problems that arise not only between Dalits and non-Dalits, but also among Dalits themselves, and particularly between Dalit men and women.
- Dalit patriarchy is somehow liberal than the Brahmanical patriarchy.
- Dalit literature per se is viewed both by the authors as well as by the readers as a strong manifesto of an exploited people's struggle, voiced by the oppressed themselves with the purpose of enforcing social change.

**The Objective of the Study**

The objectives of the research work are as follows:

- To recognize and analyze the prevailing and dissenting views on untoward principles of caste, culture and power-politics.
- To explore the dynamics of interaction between caste, culture, and politics.

- To understand the way caste, culture and politics together denigrate and dominate the Indian Dalit women..
- To critically compare three autobiographies by Dalit women writers of different linguistics, social and cultural regions.
- To examine how the discourses of the mainstream women's movement and Dalit movement influenced articulations of experienced caste discrimination in Dalit women's autobiographies.
- To examine Dalit culture to its perspectives towards the women.

**Limitation of the Study:**

The present research is limited only to the autobiographies of Bama's*Karukku,*KaushalyaBaisantri's*DohraAbhishap* and Vimal More's *Tin DagdachiChul* excluding their other literary outputs.

**Tentative Chapter Scheme**

**Chapter I: Autobiography: As a Genre of Literature**

The first chapter attempts to discussautobiography as an effective literary genre for self-expression. Many great minds have expressed themselves in this literary form. Autobiographies by women are quite different from those by the men. The autobiographies by Dalit-women writers are again different from those by non-Dalit women writers. The chapter undertakes to look into reasons behind it. The techniques, narrative styles, folklore, certain psychological faculties akin to women would also be probed.

**Chapter II: The Portrayal of the Dalit Women**

This chapter willcritically analyze the picture of the Dalit woman depicted in the selected autobiographies. The study will also try to compare Dalit women writers set in differentof regional cultural, caste, religious, traditional backgrounds, and their life pictured in selected Dalit women's autobiographies.

**Chapter III: Dynamics of Caste, Culture and Politics**

The third chapter will examine the dynamics of caste culture and politics. This dynamics which has been instrumental has been attempted to probe. This aspect has also varied implication in the three different cultural sets that the three Dalit women writers hail from. The comparison in the implication of the dynamics of caste, culture and politics of three different cultural sets would be made.

**Chapter IV:Protest in the Three Autobiographies**

The fourth chapter will bring out the protest elements in these autobiographies, the revolt against the caste, culture and politics through their autobiographies as a form of politics. Being conscious about their own oppression, Dalit women raise their voices through their writings. It provides the outburst and revolt against the politics of caste and culture. It is like a counter struggle against established system. It will attempt to show the content aspect of protest and the expressive aspect of protest in Dalit women's autobiographies. It will also try to focus on how they recognized and revolt against their oppressions in the hands of various social and political institutions like caste system, untouchability, patriarchy and culture. The intensity of struggle for identification of self will be examined.

**Chapter V: Conclusion**

This chapter will record the conclusion derived from the study.

## The Relevance and Significance of the Study

The study will help us to show that Dalit women are certainly becoming aware of themselves, confronting the continuing tyranny of caste, culture, and politics in the Indian society and the prolonged neglect of caste issues, at the same time challenging gender injustice in society and the belittlement of gender issues. In the process, they are clearly moving beyond the presentation and analysis of their cause in Dalit women in India and arguing their own case both realistically and forcefully. And thereby, they have interpreted the structural oppressions from their own point of view which offered them new vision of what they expect and offer them a collective identity. It would be significant to study and examine these three autobiographies by Dalit women placed in different socio-cultural backgrounds.

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